

Farm Bill Listening Session
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Testimony on 2007 Farm Bill
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Good Morning. I am Dr. Karen Ensle, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator for Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension of Union County. I am a Registered Dietitian and Nutrition Educator. I am also the NUSLGC/Board on Human Sciences representative for the Farm Foundation National Public Policy Conference. I want to thank Undersecretary Tom Dorr for the opportunity to offer comments on the Farm Bill Nutrition Title and USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in Robbinsville, NJ for encouraging me to participate in this important session in preparation for the Farm Bill 2007 re-authorization.

I represent Cooperative Extension Family & Community Health Sciences educators in New Jersey who are dedicated to promoting healthy, sustainable food choices with a vision of healthy people living in healthy communities which is part of our *NJ Living Well* Cooperative Extension initiative. I encourage changes in the 2007 Farm Bill that will support these *Living Well* goals of health and sustainability.

Americans enjoy one of the most bountiful and affordable food supplies in the world. Yet, with this abundance comes over consumption of total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Solutions begin with understanding consumer behavior and the factors that influence food choices.

My colleagues and I educate consumers and conduct applied research with the goal of changing and improving nutrition, food and health behaviors. Our goal is to improve the health of NJ residents so they can enjoy life, stay active, and reduce health care costs. FCHS educational programs help today's busy individuals and families make choices to enhance their health through a variety of publications, seminars, and on-line learning. Project examples include: seminars on controlling portion sizes and food safety, child obesity conferences, and *From Our Farms* Learning Boxes. I would like to address the following key points:

- NJ Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (NJ-FSNEP) and the Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)

- 2005 Dietary Guidelines—Food stamp recipients choosing healthy foods
- Fruit and vegetable incentives
- Senior farmers' market nutrition program
- Farm Bill programs as a social marketing opportunity for American health
- Technology improves customer service

NJ Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (NJ-FSNEP) and the Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)

The current food stamp policy has allowed money for nutrition education for food stamp recipients. We applaud USDA for supporting nutrition education for Food Stamp recipients and those eligible. This program gives NJ \$ 3.6 million to support staff hiring for nutrition education of the poorest folks in NJ. This grant is currently providing funding for the FSNEP program in Union County of over \$ 700,000 in dollars & match in FY 06. This USDA grant money which is part of the USDA Food Stamp Legislation has allowed me to hire 7 teaching and support staff for my county Extension office. It has strengthened my Extension office outreach in the community and has encouraged freeholders to give me additional funding for our Union County Cooperative Extension program. Unfortunately, the EFNEP program in my county has not fared as well. Overall funding from USDA for the EFNEP program has gone up which we appreciate; however, our NJ urban populations desperately need more educators funded by the EFNEP program. EFNEP is funded through CSREES and ultimately through the Farm Bill. Since the EFNEP along with the Women, Infant, Child (WIC) programs are both funded under USDA, I recommend that EFNEP be designated as the "nutrition educators" for the WIC offices in New Jersey and nationwide. WIC does not have the time to do sufficient nutrition education with their large case loads, while EFNEP's main focus is nutrition education over 6-12 weeks of hands-on learning designed to change food choices and behaviors. The EFNEP program shows impact nationally and needs to be strengthened and continued with additional funding in the new Farm Bill. Having EFNEP and WIC working as partners, brings the Cooperative Extension System and the State Department of Health to work together supporting USDA's thrust on promoting partnerships between federal and state agencies.

Both FSNEP and EFNEP Extension nutrition programs are needed to assist poor families to eat healthier and maintain safe food practices. Both of these programs in New Jersey disseminate the latest nutrition research through paraprofessionals who work directly with the public. Both of these programs are independent of each other, do not duplicate services yet address the nutrition education needs of participants from children through the elderly throughout New Jersey. Both EFNEP and FSNEP programs are run efficiently and effectively

through Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension in collaboration with the Department of Nutritional Sciences within Cook College, Rutgers University.

2005 Dietary Guidelines—Food Stamp Recipients Choosing Healthy Foods

I believe personal choice regarding foods is important, but also recognize that with limited dollars, recipients are faced with lots of food choices and claims that they may not fully comprehend. A strongly valued solution to this problem is the implementation of standards that require a percentage of the food stamp dollar being allocated to foods that meet the recommendations of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines. The balance of foods purchased and consumed would be at the discretion of the participant to allow for cultural and personal preference. The Food Stamp Program can be a powerful agent in promoting foods that promote health. The new guiding principles for FSNEP have identified key behavior outcomes. The dietary quality outcomes focus on fruits and vegetables, whole grains and nonfat or low-fat milk products.

Fruit and Vegetable Incentives

About 20% of total agricultural receipts are for produce yet only about 1% of the farm bill is devoted to fruits and vegetables. Identifying incentives to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, as part of all nutrition education programs would benefit the health of our nation. I recommend offering a provision similar to the *WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)* to food stamp recipients.

Recommend expanding the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Produce Program and providing language that supports purchasing local produce within every state. Federal procurement regulations do not provide for in state, or local preference. Therefore, schools are often forced to take the lowest bid regardless of the origin of the product. *Eliminating this would support local agriculture and provide excellent produce for children.*

Recommend supporting a domestic Market Access Program where federal funds are matched at the state level to promote fruit and vegetable promotion efforts.

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)

Our nation is in the midst of a boom of our aging population. The higher rates of chronic disease and health care expenditures in this group are a concern for all of us. Fortunately, nutrition and nutrition education can have a positive impact on the health and well-being of older adults. The SFMNP provides an opportunity to enhance the nutrition of older adults by increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables. I appreciate recent efforts of USDA to develop regulations governing the implementation of the SFMNP. I oversee the Senior Meals Program in Union County and the distribution of \$ 65,000 in vouchers to seniors for fresh produce

from local farmers at Union County Farm Markets. I urge USDA to incorporate provisions into the final regulations that provide for self-declaration of income eligibility as an alternative to more formalized means testing for the SFMNP; and permit state agencies to cap SFMNP benefits at their 2004 levels while requiring all participating state agencies to specify the hours of nutrition education to be provided to recipients.

- I recommend sufficient permanent funding for this program to support the needs of all states
- I recommend flexibility in program design while maintaining integrity of access to fruits and vegetables from local farmers for older adults. We recognize while there is a need for consistency in regulations, flexibility in program design needs to be based on community needs. (Rural vs. Urban) It is important that the distribution of funds focus on food access for older adults from local farmers.
- I support nutrition education that encourages seniors to build healthful eating patterns and take action for good health. Directives regarding promotion materials should take into consideration the reduced visual acuity of an older population (e.g. font type and size) and their cultures.

Farm Bill Programs- a Social Marketing Opportunity for America's Health

Access to fresh produce is necessary to reinforce the 2005 Dietary Guidelines. There are opportunities within the Farm Bill that support sustainable food choices and agriculture:

- Support the linking of nutrition education messages through social marketing campaigns to raise the awareness of the public to eating more produce which will improve the health of Americans.
- Support funding for the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program which allows us to work with varied age populations. Provide funding for nationwide media campaigns to promote fruit, vegetable, whole grain and reduced fat dairy product consumption.
- Expand the Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program to include New Jersey and all schools in every state. This pilot program has been successful in increasing access and consumption of fruits and vegetables for school-age children. In addition to improving the diets of children, this program provides an opportunity through market incentives for domestic farmers to diversify and increase production of fruits and vegetables strengthening local community-based food systems.

Technology improves customer service

Please provide further financial support for wireless technology at farmers markets, allowing Food Stamp recipients to consistently utilize local farmers markets. Markets that support wireless technology can bring in more people, thereby enhancing further food accessibility, affordability, improved nutrition, while also expanding consumption and sales of local farm products.

Encourage effective use of technology to improve customer service, reduce payment errors and lower administrative costs.

Use one entry point to determine eligibility for USDA and HHS programs using multiple locations in the community. Increased access via integration across other government programs (WIC, FSNEPP, Head Start, etc.) has the ability to create "one stop access" and should be available for all community based USDA programs. A central database would be a model, where benefit levels are identified, similar to a job center where public assistance, food stamps and Medicaid are already available under one roof. The database could be broadened to include WIC, SFMNP, Head Start, School Breakfast and Lunch, home care agencies.

I thank you again for this opportunity and offer the resources of my colleagues and I at Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension, Family & Community Health Sciences Department, Cook College, Rutgers –The State Land Grant University of NJ as you move forward with the 2007 Farm Bill Reauthorization.